

Story: Kent's use of social media to raise the profile of consultation

Facing a budget shortfall of £64m in 2018/19, Kent County Council proposed raising council tax to help address the budget deficit. As such, they launched a budget consultation to get the views on the proposals of local people who lived and worked in Kent. The council's revenue and tax strategy team led on the consultation, with support coming from the communications and engagement teams.

The campaign focused on social media channels. Short videos were shared on these platforms, to increase engagement and encourage those who viewed the video to further engage by reading and responding to the consultation.

Whilst campaigns such as this sometimes cause controversy, because public money is spent on them and they can therefore be framed as wasteful, there was no adverse public reaction.

Subsequent evaluation showed that the campaign provided good value for money, and had generally increased public engagement in the consultation.

The campaign was supplemented with more traditional media communications: press releases were issued and interviews given to media outlets by the leader of the council and the cabinet member for finance. The issue was covered on BBC South East Today, BBC Radio Kent and ITV Meridian, as well as in local newspapers. There were also separate consultation events, including Parish Seminars and the Kent Youth County Council.

Almost 1,000 people responded to the consultation, representing an 89 per cent increase in responses from the previous year. Additionally, traffic to the website increased by eight times in comparison to the previous year, with more than 8,000 unique page views in contrast to the fewer than 1,000 page views the preceding year. The majority of this increase is attributed to Facebook advertising, which accounted for two thirds of the additional traffic. This represented good value for money on an investment of just £2,000.

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